

May 6, 2014

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Division of Animal Health is currently investigating two cases of neurologic disease in horses from a stable in southeastern Massachusetts. There are a number of additional stables that have epidemiologic links to these cases. There is no conclusive diagnosis at this time.

There are a number of possible causes of neurologic disease in horses including some diseases which may be infectious or contagious. Out of an abundance of caution we are asking that the stable owners keep all horses in their present locations pending the results of further tests. Recommendations to these stables have included:

1. Isolate all new arrivals from the resident population.
2. Take and record temperatures of each and every horse daily.
3. Report any fevers, respiratory illness, or neurologic signs to your veterinarian immediately.
4. Use good biosecurity practices at each farm to avoid potential spread of illness within the farm.
5. Use good biosecurity practices that minimize contact with other sites to avoid potential spread of disease to other locations.

Testing for a number of diseases is currently ongoing. Further information will be made available as we know it. We appreciate the continued cooperation of horse and stable owners and their veterinarians.

May 9, 2014

The investigation regarding two neurologic horses from the same barn in southeastern Massachusetts is still ongoing. The first horse that became ill in mid April was humanely euthanized when its condition deteriorated. Test results indicate that the horse was likely suffering from Equine Protozoal Myelitis (EPM). The second horse remains hospitalized. Test results for the cause of its neurologic signs are still inconclusive.

At this time the Department is asking all barns with epidemiologic links to the index stable to continue monitoring their horses as indicated above and to report any problems to your veterinarian immediately. We appreciate your continued cooperation with regard to biosecurity and movement restrictions.

The Department also recommends that all horse owners continue to be vigilant. Most infectious and contagious diseases begin with an increase in temperature. Knowing the normal temperature of your horse is important and ensuring that your horse has a normal temperature prior to moving to an event may help prevent disease spread. People should expect increased inspections and monitoring of horse health at equine events this week.

May 12, 2014

The Division of Animal Health's investigation into the cause of neurologic disease in two horses from the same barn in southeastern Massachusetts has concluded without a definitive diagnosis. The second affected horse remains hospitalized and under veterinary care.

We appreciate the intervention of the local veterinary community and the cooperation received from stable and horse owners to ensure recommended movement restrictions were adhered to. The barns with epidemiologic links to the neurologic cases have reported no temperature spikes in horses on their premises for more than ten days since their last known contact. This information is crucial to provide confidence that the cause of illness is unlikely to be infectious or contagious. As of today, movement restrictions have been lifted on all but one barn. Pending no new information to the contrary, that barn will be eligible for release later this week.

There has been a great deal of speculation regarding the cause of this horse's neurologic symptoms. Although Equine Herpes Virus (EHV-1) may cause neurologic disease in some horses (Equine Herpes Myelitis), the virus is most often associated with outbreaks of respiratory disease in young animals or abortions in broodmares. Once a horse has acquired the virus it remains in their system for life and can complicate the interpretation of test results. Test results returned on the second horse do not indicate that its neurologic disease is likely to be caused by EHM.

As we move forward with the show season in Massachusetts, please keep in mind that anytime animals are commingled from different sources there is a chance for disease spread. One of the most helpful things that a horse owner can do is to check for a normal temperature in your animals before shipping to the show. For most diseases, the fever comes first. If any of your animals has a fever, please do yourself and everybody else a favor and sit that one out at home. Animals that are incubating disease are more likely to get worse if stressed by shipping.

Information regarding common sense biosecurity measures can be found in the document "Healthy Fairs" on the MDAR website. Further helpful information may be found at:

http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/Animal_Health/Equine_Biosecurity.html